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Agricultural Experiment Station**  
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# New Agricultural Biotechnology Publication Available from Cornell

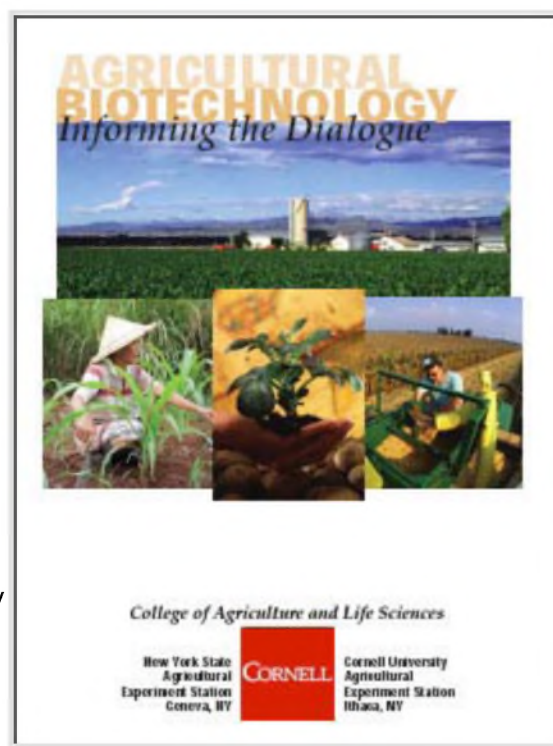
by Linda McCandless

GENEVA, NY: If you are looking for a thoughtful, balanced publication that answers fundamental questions about why genetically engineered food crops are developed, whether they are safe for humans and the environment, and how they affect the global food system, pick up a copy of "Agricultural Biotechnology: Informing the Dialogue"-the newest publication from the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station and Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS).

"The purpose of the publication is to help the public become more knowledgeable about the issues surrounding biotechnology, and develop a common understanding of its benefits and risks," said Anthony Shelton, Cornell professor of entomology, and chief architect of the publication.

The 28-page, color brochure is being widely distributed to high school science teachers in New York State, state and federal legislators, Cornell Cooperative Extension educators in New York, and grower, food, industry, and consumer groups across the country.

"Educational institution can help shed some light on the dialogue about agricultural



biotechnology by identifying the issues and presenting information to the public about what we do and do not know about these issues," said Susan A. Henry, the Ronald P. Lynch Dean of CALS. She spearheaded the publication's release with associate dean James E. Hunter, director of the Geneva Experiment Station.

"The faculty and administration recognize there is a public dialogue on agricultural biotechnology," Dean Henry said. She acknowledges that not everyone will agree with what is written. "Our aim is to present information in a thoughtful, balanced way," she said.

The publication was also intended for high school students.

"Some biology teachers in New York have avoided discussing biotechnology because they are uncomfortable with the literature and the technology's treatment in the popular media," said Shelton, who was associate director of research at CALS when the publication was first conceived. "The teachers were looking for something with balance and substance. From what we have heard from science teachers, this brochure meets their needs."

The publication covers 14 broad subject areas with text, photos and illustrations. First, it provides background information on biotechnology, and reviews some basic concepts in biology and agriculture, including what a gene is, how life forms share genes, how agriculture developed over the last 10,000 years, and what traditional plant breeding is. It identifies some of the pioneers in the field, and then goes on to discuss ag biotech as it relates to food safety, human health, the environment, and global food systems, as well as the technology's development, control, and regulation. One section discusses ethical and religious values, agricultural sustainability, and the labeling of transgenic foods. Another section reviews ag biotech issues in the media, including transgenic papaya, the Monarch butterfly controversy, and StarLink corn. A two-page glossary of terms and a list of references is included.

Calling it "comprehensive and balanced," Richard Jones, dean of research and director of the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station, praised the publication because it discusses transgenics in the historical context of biology, genetics, and plant improvement. "The discussion of transgenics in light of the inherent public skepticism of new technologies of the past is also valuable," he said. "It will be a valuable resource as we address the topic with our peers, our clientele, and the public."

The publication is part of CALS' ongoing effort to inform the public about controversial issues. A committee on agricultural biotechnology appointed by Dean Henry developed the brochure over a period of three years. The publication was written by Shelton, with assistance from Cornell professors with particular expertise: rural sociologist Tom Lyson, science communication specialist Bruce Lewenstein, educator Janet Hawkes, animal scientist Dale Bauman, and plant pathologist Herb Aldwinckle. Comments by focus groups in plant breeding and other players on the national ag biotech field were incorporated into the final publication. Previous prototypes included a poster series and an 8-page brochure that was used extensively for education and outreach.

Other outreach efforts in CALS' ag biotech series include the "What's In Store" flyer

produced with Wegman's in 2001, and a two-day Ag Biotech conference held in Ithaca in November 2000 (available in video format on-line). A shorter tri-fold on the subject of agricultural biotechnology produced in conjunction with other land grant universities will be available in late January, 2003.

These efforts and other information about agricultural biotechnology can be viewed at [www.nysaes.cornell.edu/agbiotech](http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/agbiotech). Information from Cornell is also available at [www.geo-pie.cornell.edu](http://www.geo-pie.cornell.edu)

Communications Services in Geneva produced the publication and is managing its distribution. Copies of "Informing the Dialogue" are available for \$3 each, plus postage, from Communications Services, at the NYS Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, NY, (call 315-787-2248; email [gro2@cornell.edu](mailto:gro2@cornell.edu)), or the Cornell University Resource Center (call 607-255-2080; email [resctr@cornell.edu](mailto:resctr@cornell.edu)). Discounts for multiple copies are available.

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